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ABSTRACT

The printed word is now only part of education, yet society presents a paradox to the classroom teacher by offering many attractive alternatives to reading while demanding "back to basics." Children no longer are obliged to read for enjoyment or entertainment as long as television is easily available. Parents should start taking responsibility for children using the printed word, and teachers should be willing to acknowledge the presence of media in the classroom. Several projects through which teachers can motivate reading skills while incorporating media include: (1) cutting pictures from newspapers and magazines to represent a plot line, (2) making slide presentations of that same plot line (this can be accomplished with or without a camera), and (3) making movies adapted from favorite novels. Television in the classroom can also be made into a creative experience. Through filmstrips produced in class, students have produced book reports, taught grammar to peer groups, given step by step scientific revelations, and shown how-to-do-it in math. (JEG)

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BLOODIED AND BEATEN , PERHAPS, BUT THE PRINTED WORD LIVES

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Did he or didn't he - or is it a case where only his publisher knows for sure? In other words, did Marshall McLuhan really say that print has been put out to pasture or did he not? It would seem that such a prolific author as McLuhan would not cut off his nose to spite his writing finger. Here is a poet-philosopher who is capable of shaking the foundations of our culture with his broad, exciting, far-reaching concepts. And shake the culture he did with his thoughts of the printed word. Did he or didn't he?

In this corner, the viewpoint is that he did not play Gabriel trumpeting down the walls of this civilization by abolishing the printed word. More likely he talked about print receiving a new perspective, that our culture is no longer chained to the printing press for messages, and that the printed word is part of the mosaic pattern in the educational system.

The implications are profound and yet many segments of our society are unwilling to listen to the message. Much of McLuhan's wisdom, often slighted, now comes to pass and is, in a sense, haunting the teacher and the classroom.

Kids do watch television by the buckets and do receive many "messages" from that medium. Professor Charles Winnick from CCNY has used the figure of six hours and

fifty minutes a day of television watching for the average American viewer. It is obvious where the child imitating the authority of the adults stands in this phenomenal statistic.

Society presents a paradox to the classroom teacher, on the one hand disarming the arsenal of weapons for getting the children to read while demanding the back-to-basics movement on the other. The parent or guardian keeps taking away the reasons for a child to read and write and becomes alarmed over failing grades on archaic reading tests all at the same time. Surely everyone is familiar with statistics that tell about children viewing more hours of television than time spent in a classroom when the moment of high school graduation appears. That is punctuated by the fact that many kids have their own television sets and untold thousands of preteen and teen-agers have their own telephones. Add the realization that many kids even have their own C.B. radios for bicycles and it becomes easier to see what is happening.

The teacher of today faces children who no longer must read a book for enjoyment or entertainment so long as the television set is easily available; who no longer must write "thank you" letters with the phone close at hand; who do not have to send a note when a C.B. carries the message.

Here, then, is a generation of on-rushing citizens who are plugged in to communicate electrically while training to survive in a linear culture where the printed word allows one to be privy to the existing society.

Television, in general, has responded in the "communicate electrically" matter and its information is delivered so the viewer may digest it without mental effort. Walter Cronkite has noted that all of the words on his half hour newsprogram would fill about four columns on the front page of the New York Times. An example of the absence for the necessity of linear literacy was the 1976 presidential elections, which was so thoroughly covered by the electric media. One could follow the primaries, the campaign trails, the conventions, and the election itself -- and understand exactly what was happening without the knowledge of reading or writing.

Think on it. All of this is not a tribute to despair, nor is it meant to denegrade the electric media. Rather, this is a realization that the classroom teacher must be freed from the cries that children don't read and schools aren't teaching reading. All of the reading tests in the world will not make a child read, and all of the accountability in the world will not instill the desire for reading into a child. The parent or guardian must start to take some responsibility in this matter of the printed word, and the teacher should be willing to acknowledge the presence of the media in the classroom. This is certainly not an astoundingly new revelation, for many teachers and parents do cooperate in the venture of education and together have been working towards mediated literacy.

The shock is no longer violent when the adult in the family regulates the television viewing and does, indeed, turn off the set so that the youngster will read, write, and do other school work. At the other end, the student is comfortable and at ease when the classroom agrees that the electric media is a companion to learning.

The term "environmental learning" has been over-used at times, but a child does relate and learn in a familiar surrounding. The printed word will not be entirely replaced by computers and robots, and the majority of learning, be it English, Social Studies, mathematics, science, and the like, will still depend on the student knowing well the meaning of the printed word and the ability to express thoughts and decisions in writing.

Relating media to the printed word is neither mysterious nor newly fashionable. Younsters who are learning a 'plot line' for a novel might well study for weeks and be subjected to numerous lectures about it with unexciting results. After all, background, incentive moment, crisis, climax, and the resolution are not nearly as wonderous as Starsky and Hutch. However, let that youngster learn the plot line in graphic or a visual manner and action pops in the classroom. That is, have the student cut out pictures from newspapers and magazines that represent the moments of that plot line. Paste those pictures in a sequence on oaktag and voila -- plot line!

Or have that student make a slide presentation of the plot lines. No, an expensive camera is not necessary for this and, in fact, a camera of any sorts is not needed. Slides without a camera are getting to be old hat and the materials may be purchased relatively inexpensively

Slides may be made, also, from 2 x 2 thin plastic squares (scrounged from local plastics manufacturers), clear contact paper (same as one uses for counters), small dishes to contain water, and tongue depressors that any doctor willingly donates. The student is able to make a slide presentation that follows the plot line of a book, and if a cassette recorder is available, then the student easily puts the narration on tape. A slide-tape presentation will amaze and astound any audience and will create a learning experience leading to the understanding and enjoyment of reading.

Students might make movies "adapted" from favorite novels. Hollywood would be put to shame by the super 8mm. productions that, in three minutes and twenty seconds, capture the essence of a book. Television in the classroom might well produce a real live TV show stemming from the book or a book reviewer from the Late News Show. Students have produced book reports, taught grammar to peer groups, gave step-by-step scientific revelations, and shown "how-to-do-it" in math with classroom-made film strips.

Another project to gain entrance to reading and writing is where the student must have a story-without-words. A student story board (outlines) a simple story and then takes pictures with a still camera to represent that story board. After the film has been developed the student puts the pictures on cardboard, oaktage, or whatever. This is, too, an introduction to sequential learning and is a sound meeting place for the visual and the linear. All of the projects combine writing, reading, and the visual, and it adds up to a mediated form of literacy.

Any, if not all, of the projects may be designed so that the student might share the work with the parent or guardian at home. That is not to say that the child will not do the work, but it gives a chance for school and the home to get together on mutual interests.

While most of the media presents the information to the viewer without much choice and without allowing for a sense of one's own opinions and ideas, the printed word allows the reader to conjure up untold iamges. Reading is still the manner in which information may be passed on with depth and variety. The printed word, in whatever form, is still the basis of this culture and its resulting educational process. No one relinquishes any pedagogical precedence by the introduction of, and combining with, the electric media. It is that mosaic pattern which now becomes the foundation of a classroom.

One more thought from the teacher's point of view and that relates to those tests to which children are constantly subjected. A question arises as to whether or not we are testing children on their own ability to read, etc., or on their ability to "take a test." One must wonder if those outdated tests are a true measurement in this electric age and do those tests apply to many more ethnic groups that now comprise our educational system. There are numerous school districts that once did not allow the Hispanic child, the Haitian child, and so on, to take the tests, and if that child did take the tests, then the results were hidden.

Times have changed, but one wonders if that is true with the tests.

To paraphrase John Holt, it is time to stop giving the child so many tests so that time might be devoted to learning. After all, time passes, students pass, and the printed word lingers on.

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